

The myth of gender-neutral power

Citation for published version (APA):

Merkle, O. (2018). *The myth of gender-neutral power: corruption and gender norms*. [Doctoral Thesis, Maastricht University]. Boekenplan. <https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20181205om>

Document status and date:

Published: 01/01/2018

DOI:

[10.26481/dis.20181205om](https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20181205om)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Please check the document version of this publication:

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SUMMARY

The discussion of gender and corruption is one full of extremes- women as the new perfect anti-corruption force on the one hand or as the defenseless victims of corruption on the other. Nevertheless, a thorough understanding of the nuances in this relationship is still missing. The existing academic debate on the topic is broadly centered around three questions: a) are women less corrupt than men? b) does corruption have different effects on women and c) how can women help in fighting corruption? In this dissertation, I argue that a major aspect which is too often missing in the analysis is the role of gender norms.

Corruption is most commonly defined as the “abuse of entrusted power for private gain” (Transparency International), and while definitions are widely debated they agree that power or authority plays an important role. Yet, even in the discussion on the relationship of corruption and gender ‘power’ is still largely considered a gender-neutral concept and entirely centered around men as the norm. The four essays that constitute this dissertation challenge this notion and investigate how gender norms shape forms, experiences, and persistence of corruption.

The first chapter provides a theoretical discussion on the forms of corruption that women experience and how they are shaped by gendered power structures. This chapter specifically focuses on sextortion as an example. Using data from the World Value Survey for five Sub-Saharan countries, the next chapter investigates how patriarchal views on women’s participation in politics are related to views on corruption. The third chapter is based on extensive fieldwork in Georgia. It continues the discussion by investigating how (benevolent) sexism is used to exclude women from clientelistic networks. The last chapter focuses on the gendered experiences of corruption. Based on interviews with irregular migrants and experts, the study explores how migrants experience corruption and how this is influenced by patriarchal structures.